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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNOR RESISTS COMPROMISE IN PUNJAB

REF: Islamabad 541

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Punjab Governor Salman Taseer told Principal Officer (PO) March 14 that the best solution to stabilize the provincial government continues to rely on a tie-up between the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) with a PPP Chief Minister at the helm. He dismissed the unity government idea floated by PML leader Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain (reftel), and contended that too much bad blood existed between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and PPP to make a reconciliation between the two parties feasible. However, he hedged, any decision to reconcile ultimately rests with the President and Prime Minister. Taseer noted that while the lawyers have so far had diminishing returns, he expected to give orders to put several Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) under house arrest on March 15-16 for "their own safety." PO underlined that the international community would react to the detention of any senior leadership, MPA or Members of the National Assembly. End Summary.

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Large Marches Fail to Materialize in Punjab
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¶2. (C) In a March 14 meeting with Principal Officer (PO), Punjab Governor Salman Taseer observed that the precautions taken by the authorities so far have diminished the turnout at rallies. He related that he has allowed 150 lawyers to march in Multan for 30 minutes, after which they had agreed to go home. "With only a few thousand people showing up, it looks pathetic if they sit in some parade ground," he stated. He detailed that the provincial government has decided to stop marchers at entry points into Lahore and Rawalpindi, and return them to their original province. While southern Punjab remained "completely dead," he worried that Rawalpindi might bring out trouble-makers from the slum areas and cause problems, which the police would deal with appropriately.

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Hope Still Lies with PPP-Q Tie-Up
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¶3. (C) Asked about his efforts to secure a post-Governor's Rule government in Punjab, Taseer divulged that the PPP has offered a package to the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) which gives them federal ministries and a "joint candidate" for the Chief Minister position in Punjab, but declined to offer a clear

timeline. The Chief Minister would come from the PPP, he specified, and the government would treat the PML-N as the "honorable opposition." He thought that the PML would refuse to ally with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). "N is not a party you can work with; the two mad Sharifs are beyond reason," he opined. However, he hedged, the ultimate decision rests with the President and Prime Minister. He offered that he would take a compromise if the PML-N pledged to refrain from former Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif's previous tactics, in which he failed to fulfill the terms of a coalition.

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Governor Dismisses Idea of Unity Coalition
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14. (C) The PO relayed PML leader Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain's proposal to form a unity government of the three main political parties, with a PML Chief Minister at the helm of the Punjab government (reftel). Taseer dismissed the proposal, and assessed that both Moonis Elahi, who the PML has suggested as the next Chief Minister, and his father Pervez Elahi, who formerly served as Chief Minister, would have a difficult time governing in the current situation without the "godfather of Musharraf." He reiterated that the most logical solution is a PML and PPP alliance. "Distrust and bad blood characterize the N League, and I cannot see the Chaudhrys handling the Sharifs," he surmised. He asked PO to persuade the PML leadership to accept the PPP's offer, which he believed would guarantee stability and peace in Punjab. Moreover, he suggested, additional discussions can take place regarding the constitutional arrangements, provided that former Chief Justice Chaudhry Iftikar remains off the table. "He's a highly dangerous man," he judged.

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Restoration of Eligibility Would Not Necessarily Bring Shahbaz Back in Power
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15. (C) The PO asked whether a judicial review that invalidated the decision that disqualified Shahbaz Sharif would allow Shahbaz to return to his position as Chief Minister. Taseer said that Shahbaz would still not be able to serve as Chief Minister, as demonstrated in a previous ruling. Moreover, Taseer emphasized, the PPP and PML would refuse to allow another Shahbaz tenure. "His entire program was to destroy both parties," he recalled. The PO stressed that if Shahbaz could not head the provincial government, the PPP would have to make "serious concessions on Iftikar Chaudhry and the 17th Amendment." Taseer observed that the Sharifs would likely refuse anyone else from the PML-N to take the Chief Minister position, which he speculated could split the party and diminish their influence.

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House Arrests in Punjab in the Cards
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16. (C) The Governor detailed that while southern Punjab has been quiet, he expects to put several prominent leaders under house arrest. For instance, he related, he has issued orders not to allow former president of the Supreme Court Bar Association Munir Malik to fly into Punjab from Karachi. PO underscored that arrests of senior leaders would be strongly criticized by international donors. The governor responded that 48-hour detentions would occur "for their own safety; we don't want an unpleasant incident to happen." PO repeated that arresting senior leadership, Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs), Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), or Senators was counterproductive. The governor again reported that he has asked the police to take MNA and PML-N Senior Vice-President Makhdoom Javed Hashmi to a "rest house, serve him tea and urge him to relax." PO responded that unless they engage in or actively encourage arson, vandalism or violence, the provincial government should refrain from arrests of senior political party/lawyers' movement/civil society leaders, MPAs, MNAs, or Senators. The governor restated that he planned to arrest several MPAs.

¶7. (C) During the conversation, Taseer took two phone calls. In the first telcon, he approved of allowing 10-15 people in Khanewal, Okara, and Sahiwal districts to "march up and down" and then go home. In the second telcon, he reiterated that orders to provincial police should only come from him or the Chief Secretary, and not from the Ministry of Interior.

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Comment: Governor's Distrust of PML-N Outweighs Thoughts of Compromise

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¶8. (C) The governor's faith in a PPP-PML deal, which has failed to materialize for many months, comes from a deep antipathy towards the PML-N leadership, as well as his own ambition to become Chief Minister in his own right. But as he made clear in the meeting, he will swallow any compromise sealed by his party's leadership. In the meantime, however, he will continue to work for a partnership with the PML and use arrests and blockades to stifle the long march, actions which will further complicate efforts to find a resolution to the current political crisis.

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